

THE SESSION

Several bills passed by the 2007 Montana Legislature and signed by Governor Brian Schweitzer will affect FWP's management of Montana's fish, wildlife, and parks. Most significant was the authorization of \$10 million from the state general fund for one-time purchases of fishing access sites and state parks, part of the governor's Square Deal for Montanans. Another successful component of the square deal package was a free conservation license for kids age 12 to 14 and adults over age 62, an initiative designed to get more people out fishing. Other legislation that passed:

- To reduce the amount of illegal license use, new legislation makes it clear that giving someone your duplicate (replacement) license is against the law.
- Penalties were stiffened for illegally outfitting without a license. Previously fines were so low that we often heard it was less costly to outfit illegally and be fined than to be a fully licensed outfitter.
- A new law makes clear that it is illegal to drill groundwater wells where the water removal reduces stream flows.
- The legislature authorized FWP to add the bison, pronghorn, and mountain lion to the list of big game species licenses for which the department can sell chances to win a SuperTag.
- The sunset provision on the Future Fisheries Program was lifted, allowing the program to continue. And the sunset provision on the Water Leasing Program was extended another ten years. The program allows landowners to lease water rights to FWP for in-stream flow. In addition, FWP now can permanently convert a limited number of water rights it owns to in-stream flow.
- A new law clarifies that landowners who agree, for conservation purposes, to not use water are not abandoning their water right but rather are donating the water back to the river.
- A Livestock Loss Reduction and Mitigation Board was established with the Montana Department of Livestock to help producers

reduce the risk of wolf predation and reimburse them for the cost of lost livestock.

- The legislature established a wolf license and authorized the FWP Commission to hold a lottery or auction for a wolf or grizzly license when those species are removed from the federal Endangered Species List.

Bills that didn't pass include ones that would have required statewide streamside setbacks for new housing and other development along rivers; improved the enforcement of laws prohibiting boating under the influence of alcohol; and given FWP game wardens the authority to cite minors possessing alcohol and drugs at fishing access sites and other FWP lands. (Currently, a warden needs to call the local county sheriff, who then must drive out to the site to issue citations.) Other unsuccessful bills attempted to address the long-term funding and management of the Fort Peck fish hatchery. None of these issues will go away, and FWP is committed to seeing them resolved.

For now, all of us at FWP hope you enjoy the summer and have a great time taking advantage of Montana's many tremendous outdoor recreational opportunities.

—M. Jeff Hagener, *Director, Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks*

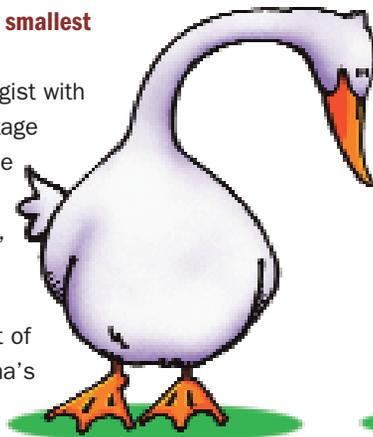
NATURAL WONDERS

Illustration by Peter Grosshauser

■ What are the largest and smallest birds in Montana? Do they also make the largest and smallest nests?

■ Paul Hendricks, a zoologist with the Montana Natural Heritage Program, says that its wide wingspan and 23 pounds make the trumpeter swan, which nests in the Red Rock Lakes National Wildlife Refuge, 50 miles west of West Yellowstone, Montana's largest bird. The small-

est, weighing just 0.1 ounce, is the calliope hummingbird. The smallest



nests are made by the calliope and Montana's four other hummingbird species, and the largest nests are those built by bald eagles, which add new material each year until the

structures can weigh a ton or more.

■ How do I find out current stream levels?

■ Go to the website that's on the "favorites" Internet browser of every fly-fisherman in Montana: The U.S. Geographical Survey website (<http://waterdata.usgs.gov/mt/nwis>). Go to the river you're interested in and find current flow, long-term flow for each day, and a graph showing how water levels have risen or dropped in the past week or month.